

By Carol Heard

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U.S. Rep. Sanford D. Bishop and Georgia Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black last week discussed the future of Georgia's agriculture sector during a meeting at the Georgia Department of Agriculture office in Atlanta, Ga.

At the meeting, both men highlighted what effect the looming budgetary pressures could have on Georgia agriculture and pledged to work together on behalf of Georgia's farmers.

"I was very pleased to sit down with Commissioner Black this morning and talk about the range of issues facing Georgia's agriculture sector, and how we can work together," Bishop said in a news release from his office. "We both recognize that the budgetary constraints facing our country will require the country to make strategic choices about our priorities, but we are committed to working across party lines to defend those programs that are absolutely essential to Georgia agriculture."

Last week, the House of Representatives passed a Continuing Resolution (CR) for the remainder of the fiscal year, which if signed into law, would make severe cuts to programs that fund conservation, rural development and innovative research programs across Georgia that have created jobs and strengthened Georgia's agriculture sector. The large cuts to agriculture programs in the bill were second only to transportation and infrastructure programs in size, and totaled \$5.2 billion, 22 percent less than 2010 levels.

The proposed cuts in the CR are just the opening salvo in the fight over cuts to agriculture funding, and a handful of members of Congress and President Obama have proposed deeper cuts to agriculture funding in the 2012 budget.

These cuts, in addition to the upcoming reauthorization of the farm bill in 2012, could dramatically alter the nation's agriculture production and Georgia's ability to compete in a global economy.

Given the constraints on our federal budget, our nation has to make strategic choices about what we can and cannot afford," Bishop said. "We both believe that the government must act in a fiscally responsible way and find efficiencies where it can. However, we are committed to working across party lines to defend Georgia's agriculture community. We must do everything necessary to ensure that our country establishes the right priorities and maintains the programs that Georgia's farmers need to continue leading America's agriculture sector."